



The Camas Post Office at 440 N.E. Fifth Ave. has been in use since 1938, according to the U.S. Postal Service. The postal service hopes to sell the building and move the operation to an annex at 2455 S.E. Eighth Ave. this year.

CAMAS POST OFFICE REMAINS IN LIMBO



Photos by STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

U.S. Postal Service employee Dan Smith helps Camas resident Julie Heiser earlier this month at the downtown Camas Post Office. The postal service has been trying to sell the building for more than two years and hopes to close a deal this summer.

After several failed attempts to sell building, USPS hopes to close a deal this year

By ERIC FLORIP
Columbian staff writer

CAMAS — More than two years after announcing its intention to sell the Camas Post Office building, the U.S. Postal Service hopes it has a buyer that may finally close the deal — and the post office — this year.

Camas, of course, has heard this before.

"We have started this process several times with who we thought were qualified buyers," said Ron Anderson, customer relations coordinator with the postal service's Portland district. "And they just didn't come to pass."

The postal service and the latest potential buyer are aiming to complete a deal as soon as August, Anderson said. That would move the Camas Post Office out of its historical location at 440 N.E. Fifth Ave., a quaint brick building it's called home for more than 70 years.

If the sale goes through, retail services and post office boxes would relocate to an annex building at 2455 S.E. Eighth Ave. The main

post office's employees would move with it, Anderson said. He noted that the new location would be fully set up before the old building closes to smooth the transition.

"There will not be any interruption in retail services, and certainly no interruption in mail delivery," Anderson said.

The postal service has characterized the move as a business decision, a way to save money for an already ailing agency. But downtown business owners worry about what it will mean for the city's core.

Don Blaske considers the post office, which is about a block away from his Naturally Healthy pet food store on Northeast Fifth Avenue, a landmark. He and other businesses use the post office as a reference point for customers trying to find them. And it builds community having the service in Camas' heart, he said.

Blaske uses the post office almost daily, mailing letters, bills and products for his business a short walk away. The proposed move would put the post office about a mile away.

"I'd probably go once a week," Blaske said.

Plenty of downtown merchants are disappointed to see the post office leave the city's core, said Brent Erickson, executive director of the Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce. The service reliably brings traffic to the area, and provides a boost for downtown, he said. Given ongoing economic struggles, downtown Camas doesn't need another hit when it already has several hollow storefronts, he said.

"You're losing a major part of the downtown that draws a lot of people," Erickson said of the post office, later adding: "You hate to see anything go that takes away from the walking traffic downtown."

The move came close to happening last year, when Will Macia reached a tentative agreement to buy the building. The president of the Vancouver-based Last U.S. Bag Company had planned to use the space for his business.

Macia, who lives in Camas, said he loves the building's charm

and location and hoped to move in. But the company uses large embroidery equipment that simply couldn't fit in the space the way it was needed, he said. The business was forced to back out of the potential deal.

"We had a square peg, and we couldn't get it into a round hole," Macia said.

Until the latest possible deal closes, the Camas Post Office remains in limbo. A "For Sale" sign still stands in front of the building that's been a post office since 1938, according to Anderson.

Some Camas residents hold their own ideas for what the location should be, if not a post office. They'll have to wait a little longer to find out.

"It's such a great building," Macia said. "Somebody's going to grab it, and somebody's going to have a great building."

ERIC FLORIP: 360-735-4541; http://twitter.com/col_enviro; eric.florip@columbian.com